

AN
ORATION

DELIVERED JULY 4, 1788.

AT THE REQUEST OF THE

Inhabitants of the Town of Boston,

IN CELEBRATION

OF THE ANNIVERSARY OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,

BY

HARRISON-GRAY OTIS, Esquire.

PRINTED BY

BENJAMIN RUSSELL, STATE-STREET, BOSTON.

1788.



AT a Meeting of the Freeholders and other Inhabitants of the
town of BOSTON, duly qualified and legally warned, in pub-
lick Town-Meeting assembled, at Faneuil-Hall, on Friday
the 4th day of July, A. D. 1788, VOTED,

THAT the Selectmen be and hereby are appointed a Com-
mittee to wait on HARRISON GRAY OTIS, Esq. and
in the name of the Town, to thank him for the spirited and ele-
gant Oration this day delivered by him, at the request of the
town, upon the anniversary of the Independence of the United
States of America, in which, according to the institution of the
town, he considered the feelings, manners and principles which
led to that great national event—And to request of him a copy
thereof for the press.

Attest,

WILLIAM COOPER, Town-Clerk.

Boston, July 5, 1788.

THE candour of my fellow citizens led them, yesterday, to
approve, what the impartial world may censure or condemn—A
sense of duty only outweighs my fears.

I have the honour to be, with sentiments of respect, Gentlemen,
your most obedient and most humble servant,

H. G. OTIS.

To the Gentlemen Selectmen, &c.

AN
ORATION.

FRIENDS AND FELLOW CITIZENS,

AMONG those nations which at various times have successfully vindicated the rights of civil liberty, we may observe but few that have submitted to a frequent and formal recurrence to the original motives of their conduct.—Transported with the enjoyment of freedom, they have forgotten the means by which it was attained.—The memoirs of recent transactions have been neglected for less important researches into ancient times. Men have been ashamed to repeat what all were presumed to know ; and the noble deeds of their fathers, rescued from the rubbish of ages, and obscured by the clouds of tradition, have been handed to posterity through the medium of later history. The citizens of United
America

America furnish exceptions to these remarks—her Historians and Orators have been usually employed in the faithful narrative of their own times ; and it is easy to discover a very general fondness for the rehearsal of those scenes in which living worthies have been the principal actors. Such are the objects of this anniversary, and was it in my power to do justice to the subject—which I feel it is not—a display of the principles, manners, and feelings, which led to our independence, would prove not less instructive in the recital, than the probable consequences of that glorious event are pleasing in anticipation.

A REVIEW of the history of the North-American settlements, exhibits an early and almost a continual struggle between tyranny and avarice upon one side, and an ardent sense of native liberty upon the other.

THOSE are mistaken who think that the original source of oppression may be traced in the ordinance of the Stamp-Act. The first colonial institution established in Virginia was subjected to an arbitrary council, dependent upon the capricious pleasure of a king. Patience and enterprize at length had discovered to the inhabitants

inhabitants a staple production at that period, peculiar to the colony, when the harsh mandate of a tyrant forbade the cultivation of it, and condemned commerce to defile her infant hands in the fruitless, ignoble drudgery of searching after mines.

IN other southern colonies instances are not wanting of inquisitorial writs and of violated charters.

It must however be allowed, that, sheltered by the canopies of their paramounts, they were in general less exposed than their sister provinces to the scorching rays of supreme majesty. Advancing into New-England the system of oppression becomes more uniform, and the resistance consequently more conspicuous. No affluent proprietary appeared to protect our hardy ancestors. The immeasurable wild had yielded to their industry a vacancy barely sufficient for their household Gods: At the same moment the pestilential breath of a despot blew into their country a swarm of locusts commissioned to corrode their liberties to the root. Even in those early times not only the freedom but the use of the press was prohibited—new taxes were imposed—old charters were abrogated—citizens were impressed: The crown of England restrained emigrations from
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that country, discouraged population upon this side of the atlantick, confiscated estates, suppressed the habitual modes of publick worship, and precluded the wretched privilege of complaint. Oppressed in a manner so irritating, so unworthy, how did our forefathers sustain these accumulated miseries? Did they crouch dismayed beneath the iron sceptre? Did they commit treason against themselves by alienating the dearest prerogatives of humanity? No—We find them persevering in decent, pathetick remonstrances in the time of Charles the first, refusing to surrender their patent to Cromwell, and exhibiting a bill of rights at the time of the restoration. After the abdication of James, the triumph of liberty in Britain, became compleat. Ministers naturally grew fearful lest her pervading influence should extend to the colonies; and from the era of the revolution, until the gloomy hour of the Stamp-Act, the plan of our slavery was always resumed in the intervals of domestick peace.—Affairs now assumed a more serious aspect; the minds of men became vehemently agitated, and after a sad variety of disappointment the citizens of these provinces were compelled to draw their swords and to appeal to the God of armies.—What then may we
hence

hence infer were the principles which actuated the high spirited Americans placed in a situation so critical and disastrous! They were elevated, patriotick, godlike—they induced a voluntary sacrifice of ease and fortune, a contempt for danger, and inspired confidence in leaders chosen by themselves—What were the manners! These consisted in honour, temperance, fortitude, religion—What were the feelings!—These no power of language can describe—Had they still continued to animate our bosoms, they might have supplied the want of a new government, which now alone can save us from perdition.

I PASS over the eventful history of the late war—my feelings otherwise would impell me to devote too large a portion of time, to eulogies upon the heroes who have fought and bled, and those who have returned to the bosom of their country, objects of jealousy, victims of neglect.

IN an attempt to detail the effects which have flown from our independence, and which may hereafter ensue, it is difficult to be concise without seeming superficial, or to be diffusive without becoming tedious—My observations will accordingly be general—I feel the humblest conviction

tion of my incompetency to this duty.—It appears, I speak with diffidence, that while we with reason have lamented the late untoward circumstances of confederated America, we have been prone to err in charging ourselves with the most disgraceful, perfidious conduct, that ever blackened the character of a nation.—Whereas it is certain that to apply the attributes of morality exclusively to any people, is a fallible experiment. All nations conduct nearly alike in similar predicaments, and words only constitute the difference between punick faith and British plausibility. The morose and gloomy have imagined that honour, virtue and publick spirit, had bid an eternal adieu to the country.—The pusillanimous have descried the flaming thunderbolt threatening us on high; and persons of all descriptions have consented with a most unnatural promptitude to execrate the measures and to blast the honour of the best and happiest country in the globe.

I do not intend to give umbrage to the gentlemen of any country, when I assert that this reproachful dialect has been partly acquired from individuals of a nation whose passions, prejudices and disappointment strongly conspire to pervert their reason—Individuals, who setting

ring at defiance all historical truth and comparison; have stigmatized us with the most opprobrious and unmerited impeachments. Americans have listened to these calumnies but have not considered the time and experience requisite for the arrangement of a new and mighty empire. Thus the clamours of invective have been constantly re-echoed from Georgia to New-Hampshire, from the Alleganey to the ocean.

It must not however be denied that this country has been hastening to a deplorable crisis. I mean only to suggest that the progress was natural and would have been incident to any other nation.

THE annals of Britain are stained with a fordid detail of treasons and rebellions more flagrant than were ever conceived in the fields of Wyoming, or perpetrated upon the heights of Springfield. The vigorous monarchy of France has been subject to similar casualties; and this magnificent nation in the frequent reduction and adulteration of her coin, has exhibited as direct a violation of national faith as America would exhibit, should she, which God forbid, declare herself bankrupt at this moment.

ONE fundamental cause of our late embarrassments, I apprehend has originated not only in a scarcity of specie, but in the increased demand for the usual circulating quantum.—Previously to the late war there seldom existed in the hands of our farmers a great capital of specie, neither did the exigencies of the country require it. The principal quantities belonged either to our merchants who employed it in commerce, or to persons who lived on a regular income, and who generally possessed property in the British funds. From this last class, a great proportion of the middling landholders obtained money which they immediately expended for active and productive stock—The interest of this money constituted the income of the lenders, and while *this* was punctually paid both parties were at ease—The residue of the farmers who were well established, procured their needful supply of money by the sale of produce to the merchants.

At the commencement of the late war, those mortgaged men who owned property in Britain almost universally went over to that country. The treaty of peace, with justice I presume, restored to them the power of recovering their debts, and a long suspension of the interest together

gether with the nature of their new connections rendering the principal necessary, operated to create an instantaneous demand—A demand, which it is manifest would not otherwise have arisen, but in the successive course of mortality—The merchant also finding himself deprived of the usual means of remittance, and having no further need of produce or of labour, became importunate for specifick payments, and withdrew his aid from the farmer and the artisan. War had increased the weight of taxes—our system of finance was imperfect—The late flood of paper became stagnant in the country, and the few remaining rivulets of specie were almost entirely drained by exportations subsequent to the peace.—A few monied men, however, still remained; but seeing so many resources obstructed, they naturally became diffident of lending, and the signet which impressed the first Tender-Act, sealed up all the private coffers in the united continent.

INVOLVED in perplexities so truly distressing, it was natural in men who did not think profoundly to fancy themselves oppressed. The discontented yeomen neglected agriculture, and either migrated towards the western waters, or fostered the woes of each other at home, with sentiments extracted from seditious writings; while the

the industrious mechanicks—the pride of our cities—were sometimes obliged to sell the implements of their crafts to procure sustenance for wives and children used to happier days—I forbear to expatiate upon the excessive usury, the inconsistent acts of the several States, the continuance of our ruinous commerce with Britain, and the neglect of our magnanimous ally. All these particulars have contributed to our misfortunes—each of them affords ample subject for an oration.

THESE disorders were imputed to various causes, and all the remedies of political empiricism have been successively prescribed. A general Convention of the States proved to be the only medium through which our extensive difficulties could be reduced to one point of view. It there became manifest that the language of requisition would no longer be heard, and this had been energetick, only when we had in view, the proscription of our patriots, the devastation of our fields, the conflagration of our cities. When it was easy to repair to the various aceldamas of the continent, and to cherish the spirit of patriotism over tombless heaps of martyred brethren. The veil of our national affairs was afterwards uplifted in the several Conventions of the

the States.—What gloomy features did the portrait exhibit ! Who can hear without trembling, that this happy land wherein we dwell—the dear domestick seats of which we are possessed—and this temple, sacred to Almighty God, are mortgaged to strangers, subject to conditions the most humiliating, at the same time the most indispensable.

THE late Federal Convention, commanding all the sources of information, unawed by fear, unbiassed by self interest, in a time of peace, after mature deliberation, has proposed a form of government, which involves political consequences of greater importance than have yet attracted the attention of mankind—It is neither my design, nor is it within my capacity, to trace the nice dependencies of power, or the admirable assimilation of interest, or any of the peculiar excellencies which distinguish this system—Men whose merits I cannot hope to reach in any future period of my life, have made me to despair of my ability even to repeat with advantage—The measure of my ambition will be satisfied if a few remaining observations be not deemed trite and familiar.

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THE necessity of a reformation in our national Government, has been long allowed by men of honest and liberal sentiments, however opposed to the federal system—But these cautious characters have deemed it sufficient to concede to our present Congress, the controul of impost and of commerce, alledging that gradual extensions of power might be proportioned to future exigencies—Happy is it for us, my respected friends, that this project has never been adopted. Without a comment upon these exploded systems, which blend the various departments of power, or upon the delusive phantom of a sovereignty, incapable of employing its resources—one argument seems unequivocal—A single body of men, feeling the deficiency of their powers in other particulars, sensible at the same time that great justice was expected from their new acquisition; assailed upon every side by foreign and domestick creditors, anxious as well for their personal honour, as for the credit of the States, must have been too subject to the dominion of their passions—they must have been prodigal of the publick treasure—The spirit of extreme justice would have operated too suddenly—The people have generally been ignorant of the internal measures and arrangements of the Congress, owing

owing to their want of an immediate interest and connection in the appointment of the members; remaining uninformed of the distribution of their taxes, they would have grown jealous and uneasy—and the solitary plea of publick faith would have proved an unavailing apology for the real or imaginary neglect of publick economy.

In regard to the other part of the project—the future enlargement of power—it is rational to conclude that the same opposition which exists at present, would have arisen hereafter to a total change: And what benefit could have resulted from a partial reform, while our prejudices and corruption would have kept pace with the alterations! Admit, however, that the controul of impost and of commerce had been adequate to the purposes of the union, when peace was declared, and that it had been vested in Congress at that moment; other powers of equal importance are now become requisite. If it be a certain position, * “that the union of the entire strength of individuals, constitutes the political state of a community,” it seems equally conclusive that the union of the entire strength of the several members,

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* MONTESQUIEU'S Spirit of Laws.

is essential to the safety and perfection of a political confederacy—To confirm these observations in their relation to our country, we need only advert to a few obvious facts—

GREAT-BRITAIN still regards this country with a grudging eye, her Ministers have secured her interest in several European cabinets—over the politicks of Holland her ascendancy is complete—France is obliged to attend to her domestick police, which has become somewhat deranged, during her exertions in favour of America. Our fishery is an object of national emulation with our friends, as well as with our foes, and is liable to be molested. Our western posts are not surrendered. Our captive friends in the Mediterranean bend under the burdens of cruel task-masters. Hostile tribes of Indians make daily incursions upon our frontier, and are supplied by Spaniards and by English men, with the apparatus of modern war.—Thus the horrors of savage ferocity are increased by the contribution of civilized malice. *The emigration into the ceded territories, will soon deserve

* Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York and Virginia, have ceded to the United States of America, the boundless territory

deserve the attention of a powerful union. The district of Kentucky is already turbulent in its connection with Virginia, and containing 60,000 inhabitants calls aloud for independence. Indeed it is hardly to be expected that the present exhausted fountain of federal light, can long supply those distant and increasing orbs—The period may not be remote when the spirit of enterprize which has peopled those sequestered regions will betray the atlantick States into a war with Spain, although peace and neutrality be to them of the greatest importance. In short, America stands alone—Her present enfeebled governments offer many temptations to her enemies, and but few allurements to her friends.—The former are malignant, the latter will soon be discouraged—We must either prescribe to the old world the terms of our future connection, or we must receive with gratitude whatever conditions the nations of Europe shall be pleased to impose upon us.

ANOTHER

which is known by the general appellation of the OhioCountry. It stretches, however, to an immense distance beyond the fertile banks of that mighty river, into cold and lonely deserts, which resound only with the discordant cries of hunted beasts and naked barbarians.—South Carolina has ceded unnumbered acres within the Mississippi, and the conditions of the Georgian grant are, I am told, fulfilled by the ratification of nine States.

ANOTHER principal argument against the federal system, has been founded upon the unqualified alternative of adoption or rejection, to which the States were confined. It was deemed precipitate, and therefore decreed dangerous—I presume, however, by this time, I shall be countenanced in asserting, that had the General Convention adjourned to receive and to consider objections, no system of government would have been adopted by the States unless tendered upon the point of the sword;—The local circumstances of each State, must have given rise to various and incongruous proposals; the fancied probability of attaining their objects, would have rendered each respectively tenacious, and the opponents of the system in the several States, having formed a general league, would have been actuated by the unrelenting fervours of delineated party—Suppose another model after various difficulties had been proposed, is it not manifest that old objection would have been revived, new exceptions started; and that political scepticism would have distracted the community!—Yes, my fellow-citizens, we might have condemned, we might have executed, but what power could have reversed the attainer—Reason may conjecture, but God only knows, the consequences which must have ensued.

I ENTREAT your indulgence while I employ a few moments in diverting your attention from the view of these melancholy contingencies, which I trust in God we shall never realize, to a more splendid prospect.—In the first place may I be allowed to felicitate my countrymen upon the internal appearance of the affairs of this State—The chair of government is adorned by the patriot whose sacrifices and services have endeared him to a grateful people, our faithful Ambassador is reinvested with the honours of his country, and all the elections lead us ardently to expect and desire a perfect coalition of parties.—The rapid accession of nine States, affords a pleasing presage of the rising glory of the union—Upon this subject it might be expected that I should enlarge—But, my Federal Friends! Victorious wisdom disdains the insults of a triumph—Let us rather repose upon the hope, that the unexampled spirit of conciliation which pervades throughout, will soon bury all but the endearing distinctions of countryman, friend, brother.

A PARTIAL sketch of the natural, accidental and moral advantages that will result to the confederated States, shall relieve your patience.—For the first class we are indebted to the variety of climate, soil and productions

ductions which render the wants and labour of one State subservient to those of another—to our remarkable exemption from pestilence, earthquakes, and the dreadful convulsions of nature—to the rivers which intersect our country—to the security of our harbours, and to the extent of our seacoast, rendering the conquest of the thirteen States almost impossible. The accidental advantages consist in our remoteness from the cabals of Europe—in our convenient position relative to the West-Indies, and in the inability of these islands to flourish without our commerce—in the resources we possess for the discharge of our taxes—in the persecution and oppression of other countries—in the necessity of frugal and industrious habits to which we are subject—in the sense of liberty bequeathed by our ancestors, and finally in our freedom from the dominion of nobles and of hierarchs. Among moral circumstances may be computed, the toleration of religious sects—the respectability of the clergy—the encouragement of education—the liberty of the Press—equality of property—conjugal fidelity—and the jurisdiction remaining in the several States, whereby life, liberty and property will be secured.

HAPPY

HAPPY, happy America, enriched by Heaven with its choicest blessings, may the wisdom of thy councils, and the virtue of thy sons, accelerate the peace, and happiness, and perfection of mankind.



AN ORATION

Delivered at the funeral of the late
General Pitt Rivers, May the eighth of the month,
and the value of the same, according to the peace, and
happiness, and good of mankind.

